



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor Palin Announces Health Priorities

December 4, 2008, Anchorage, Alaska – Governor Sarah Palin today announced her goals to improve Alaska’s health and education through fiscal year 2010 budget requests, the formation of a health care commission, support for legislation and an informational campaign to help Alaskans take better care of their own health.

Governor Palin put a priority on children’s health and development.

“Children are the most valuable resource in Alaska,” she said. “We have to do more to support health coverage and health care, because it plays such a big role in a child’s success in school, and in life. Our state agencies are partnering to better equip Alaskans to lead healthier lives and to meet health care needs across the state.”

Governor Palin called for increased coverage of Alaska’s children under Denali KidCare, state funding to reverse childhood obesity and improve diagnosis of autism, and increased funding for Alaska’s Head Start preschool programs.

The Governor joined Health and Social Services Commissioner Bill Hogan, Education and Early Development Commissioner Larry LeDoux, Labor Commissioner Click Bishop, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Jay Butler, and University of Alaska Anchorage Chancellor Fran Ulmer to announce health and education priorities.

Highlights of the Governor’s priorities in health and education:

- Establish the Alaska Health Care Commission to provide recommendations for and to foster the development of a statewide plan to address the quality, accessibility, and availability of health care for all citizens of the state.
- Support legislation to increase the income eligibility guidelines for Denali KidCare to 200 percent of Alaska’s federal poverty level. Such an increase would make about 1,300 more children and about 225 more pregnant women eligible for health coverage under Denali KidCare.
- Continue our investment in the Tobacco Use Education and Cessation Fund to boost Alaska’s tobacco prevention and control program.

- Fund Alaska's obesity prevention and control program and work toward reversing the trend of childhood obesity.
- Spend \$250,000 to offer better access to early screening and diagnosis of autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders.
- Develop a statewide initiative called Live Well Alaska. The interactive web-based campaign will provide the best recommendations for eating healthier, being more physically active and quitting tobacco use.
- Increase funding for Head Start preschool programs by \$800,000. The additional funds will allow the program to serve 60 to 80 more children. Approximately 1,000 Alaska children remain on waiting lists for Head Start. This funding is in addition to \$600,000 in increased funding that Head Start received last fiscal year.
- Spend \$2 million for the Department of Education to implement a pilot preschool program. School districts would receive the funding through grants. The half-day preschools would serve up to 500 children statewide.
- Fund the University of Alaska's Family Residency Program.

Governor Palin will release the complete fiscal year 2010 Operating and Capital budgets on December 15.

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Audio from today's press conference can be found at:
http://gov.state.ak.us/audio/Gov_Health_12042008.mp3